

# **Iowa Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant: Year 1 Final Report**

## **Executive Summary**

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## **Introduction and Background**

In the fall of 2004, the Iowa Department of Education applied for a three-year U.S. Department of Education-sponsored Teacher Quality Enhancement (TQE) grant to strengthen teacher education through reforms that hold teacher preparation programs accountable, improve prospective teachers' knowledge of academic content, and ensure that teachers are well prepared for the realities of the classroom. The grant was subsequently awarded, and grant implementation began in October 2005. The grant is now in its second year, allowing the evaluation team to analyze data from the first 1½ years of the implementation activities. This executive summary provides an overview of what is contained in the first annual report to the Iowa Department of Education and, more specifically, to the Iowa Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant Team.

The mission of Iowa's TQE program is to reform and enhance the teaching capacities of Iowa's future teachers so that every Iowa child will have access to the highest quality education possible. The Iowa Department of Education aims specifically to enhance the quality of new teachers who enter the profession upon graduation from Iowa-based colleges and universities. The Grant Implementation Team aims to do this by focusing on seven core areas (managed by seven unique teams): reading and writing in the content areas, middle-level content, English language learners, assessment, dispositions assessment, cross-institutional articulation, and collaboration.

The seven teams are organized around four project goals that are designed to focus on improving various aspects of teacher preparation. Although each team operates independently of the others, each team's work complements the goals of the others in order to collectively strengthen the spectrum of teacher preparation activities.

### **Project Goals and Team Alignment**

The four project goals and respective team alignment are outlined as follows.

#### **Goal 1: Strengthen Teaching in the Content Areas**

The Reading and Writing in the Content Areas Team is working to strengthen the teaching of reading and writing in the content areas. The team is solely focused on developing models and building the capacity of content-area teacher educators, teacher candidates, and teachers in using research-based instructional strategies.

The Middle-Level Content Team is working to strengthen teaching in the content areas so that middle school teachers enter the profession equipped to succeed with students whose grade-level needs are just as unique as elementary and high school. In the end, this team plans to establish a middle school endorsement that would be awarded to teachers who meet articulated requirements for middle grades—in essence, this endorsement would be a signal to hiring authorities that particular teachers meet a new standard for teaching middle grades subjects.

Although not a component of this Year 1 evaluation due to its relative newness, the Language Arts Team also is working toward the objectives of Goal 1, including strengthening the core content requirements for secondary teachers. The Language Arts Team reviewed the requirements

for endorsements for English, speech, and journalism and found an overlap in the requirements; the team thus decided to broaden and strengthen the knowledge-base requirements for English teachers in Iowa. The team developed the Language Arts endorsement based on the standards of the national content networks for each discipline. Further evaluation of the Language Arts Team will be included in subsequent reports.

## **Goal 2: Improve Teaching for Diverse Populations**

The English Language Learners Team focuses on improving instructional quality and increasing the extent to which technology is used to facilitate that process.

## **Goal 3: Reform and Improvement Through Analysis**

The Assessment Team is developing evaluation tools to measure new-teacher effectiveness, creating assessments to identify the strengths and weaknesses in the preparation of first- and second-year teachers as well as developing the capacity of teacher education programs to regularly gather, manage, and analyze teacher performance data.

The Dispositions Assessment Team is researching and creating effective techniques for assessing ethical and professional behaviors (dispositions) of teacher education candidates with the goal of developing a statewide model.

The Cross-Institutional Articulation Team is working to organize and facilitate conversations between two-year and four-year colleges of teacher education. Specifically, the team is working to create a statewide cross-articulation agreement that strengthens mathematics and oral/written communication skills of preservice teacher candidates, establishes basic competency testing, and eliminates transfer barriers between two-year and four-year colleges.

## **Goal 4: Meeting Future Challenges Through Collaboration**

The Collaborative Plus Team focuses on developing and facilitating collaborations that allow teachers to serve the needs of all students—particularly those with disabilities, gifted and talented students, English language learners, and students who are considered or have the potential to be at risk. It is worth noting here that the Grant Implementation Team has incorporated the work of Iowa’s Induction and Mentoring program to help contribute to the objectives of Goal 4, but the Induction and Mentoring work will not be part of the evaluation efforts at Learning Point Associates.

## **Evaluation Overview**

Learning Point Associates—an Illinois-based, nonprofit education research and professional services organization—was contracted to conduct an evaluation of the grant implementation activities. The English language learners evaluation (Goal 2) is being conducted entirely by Donald B. Yarbrough, Ph.D., and his colleagues at the University of Iowa. The Learning Point Associates evaluation team is working in partnership with the English language learners evaluation team to ensure complementary approaches to the individual evaluations. The English

language learners evaluation discussion and findings are included in a separate report focusing on the same time period.

The evaluation plans that guide the work of Learning Point Associates and the University of Iowa were written specifically to measure the project implementation goals developed by the Iowa Department of Education and to ensure the fidelity of the evaluation across all three years of the grant.

## **Research Questions**

To understand how Iowa has created and implemented interventions to promote improvements in the teaching capacities of Iowa's future teachers who graduate from Iowa colleges and universities, the following research questions provide the framework for the evaluation:

1. To what extent has Iowa strengthened teaching in the content areas for those who seek to enter the profession of teaching?
2. Has Iowa better prepared new teachers to support and teach diverse student populations, specifically targeting English language learners?
3. What has Iowa done to reform teacher education programs to make them more effective through rigorous analysis of candidates and program performance data?
4. Through collaboration, to what extent is Iowa meeting future challenges to help new teachers meet the educational demands for the 21st century?

Learning Point Associates is using both formative and summative assessments during the three-year grant period to monitor project implementation and to determine overall project quality, merit, and worth in relation to project goals and expectations specifically related to Research Questions 1, 3, and 4. As previously mentioned, Research Question 2 is being evaluated by the University of Iowa. Essentially, the evaluation will measure interventions designed to promote improvements in the quality of new teachers through comprehensive statewide reform activities.

The first annual report, titled *Iowa Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant: Year 1 Final Report*, spans the implementation activities in Year 1 as well as the first half of Year 2. It begins with an overview of the evaluation methods and processes, followed by a discussion of the accomplishments and findings associated with the six teams falling under the Learning Point Associates evaluation umbrella. Further, complementary findings across the teams are presented, including facilitators and barriers associated with implementation and a discussion about collaboration within and among the teams. The report concludes with recommendations and a plan for next steps.

To access the full report, please visit the Iowa Department of Education's *Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant Programs* website ([http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=default.htm](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=default.htm)).

## **Evaluation Methods**

Data for the evaluation report were collected during the winter of 2006–07 and the spring of 2007 through interviews with team members and other stakeholders, document reviews, and a survey. Progress monitoring also was used to evaluate team activities. The evaluation team chose a multimethod approach to examine the various activities of the TQE teams as well as to garner a variety of data to illustrate the extent to which the teams are reaching their individual goals and contributing to the larger grant goals. The methods of data collection and a detailed account of the analysis and findings are described in depth in the full report.

## **Evaluation Findings**

The presentation of evaluation findings is organized according to the three primary research questions being examined by the evaluation team: Research Questions 1, 3, and 4. Following each question is a discussion about the extent to which the research question has been met in Year 1. For information about Research Question 2, see the evaluation report submitted by the University of Iowa dated May 2007, which is available online (<http://www.education.uiowa.edu/cea/documents/TQELLYear1Report051107WEB.pdf>).

### **Research Question 1: To What Extent Has Iowa Strengthened Teaching in the Content Areas for Those Who Seek to Enter the Profession of Teaching?**

Work that falls under this question is primarily being addressed by the Reading and Writing in the Content Areas Team as well as the Middle-Level Content Team.

#### **Discussion of Research Question 1**

Although the Reading and Writing in the Content Areas Team and the Middle-Level Content Team are moving work forward to strengthen teaching in the content areas, a lack of participation by stakeholders for the Reading and Writing Team initiatives has somewhat hindered the overall success of this goal. The results of the Reading and Writing Team's midcourse corrections to remedy issues related to the lack of participation remain to be seen. An interviewee from a different Iowa TQE team mentioned that she felt as though her team's success was due in part to the fact that the team was responding to a real need in the field. It is possible that stakeholders for the particular initiatives offered by the Reading and Writing Team did not consider this situation to be the case. However, the forthcoming summer institutes may address that issue. Team members across the TQE grant stressed the importance of creating buy-in among stakeholders and getting assistance from key contacts (even those not affiliated with the grant) to develop and disseminate work. For example, the Middle-Level Content Team expended a great deal of time presenting drafts of the middle school endorsements to various stakeholder groups in order to garner feedback. Last, where appropriate, the Middle-Level Content Team and the Reading and Writing Team may consider collaborating or partnering on activities that seek to work toward the same goal.

### **Research Question 3: What Has Iowa Done to Reform Teacher Education Programs to Make Them More Effective Through Rigorous Analysis of Candidates and Program Performance Data?**

Work toward this evaluation question is primarily being addressed by the Assessment Team, the Cross-Institutional Articulation Team, and the Dispositions Assessment Team.

#### **Discussion of Research Question 3**

As a group, the Assessment Team, Cross-Institutional Articulation Team, and Dispositions Assessment Team are making sizeable progress toward answering Research Question 3. The

Assessment Team created and disseminated two requests for proposal and monitors the implementation of dozens of data management and collection systems across several two- and four-year institutions in Iowa. Similarly, the Dispositions Assessment Team is in its final stages of completing the conceptual framework of the top 23 dispositions that a teacher candidate should possess in order to be an effective teacher. This framework, along with the team's developmental assessment tools, will be shared and piloted within the Iowa education community and possibly will serve as a model that can be used for other states. Finally, the Cross-Institutional Articulation Team is still in the early stages of meeting an ambitious goal by bringing two- and four-year institutions together to discuss courses, standards, and mechanisms related to implementing and sustaining a statewide articulation agreement.

#### **Research Question 4: Through Collaboration, to What Extent Is Iowa Meeting Future Challenges to Help New Teachers Meet the Educational Demands for the 21st Century?**

Work toward this evaluation question is primarily being addressed by the Collaborative Plus Team.

#### **Discussion of Research Question 4**

A variety of factors caused the Collaborative Plus Team to get off to a late start working on activities toward its goal. Most team members, however, feel that the team is now on track to meeting the objectives. The challenge presented by a variety of work styles and experiences among team members seemed to be some of the cause to the group's delayed planning, but most interviewees now see this challenge as a facilitator. Despite the recent strides made in action planning for the team, it appears as though several outcomes and measures of success have yet to be articulated. Most of the interviewees also mentioned that they did not think the Collaborative Plus Team's work would be completed within the life of the grant so it will be important to stay focused on the specific tasks in the action plans.



## **Complementary Findings Across Teams**

Data analysis not only sheds light on the work of the individual teams respective to their goals but also allows for the analysis of common themes that exist across all of the TQE teams. This section discusses those common themes and explores their significance for meeting expectations of the TQE grant in the future.

### **Connecting to the Overarching Theme of the TQE Grant**

Across TQE teams, there appears to be a sense of team members' ability to make connections between their work and the overall theme of the Teacher Quality Enhancement grant. In several instances, interviewees discussed links between their team objectives and indicated how the objectives will ultimately benefit teacher quality in Iowa through improved teacher education. One interviewee stated, "Being able to have this grant has been so critical to the development and the improvement of teacher prep here."

### **Stakeholder Involvement**

Most TQE team members recognize the importance of support, feedback, and influence from stakeholders. Support from the Iowa Department of Education and/or the Iowa Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, for example, can facilitate the participation and cooperation of stakeholders that are more directly impacted by the work, such as individual universities. One interviewee mentioned, "I think that's a huge plus because there's always somebody that you can go to. There's always somebody at the DE [Iowa Department of Education] so that you kind of got your foot in the door." Furthermore, acquiring input and feedback from several relevant stakeholders, while often challenging, can improve the probability that final team decisions are representative of many perspectives, thereby increasing chances of success.

### **Strength of Team Leadership and Team Members**

Interviewees commonly mentioned the strength of team leadership as a facilitator. Teams benefited from leaders who were capable of organizing the work of the team and facilitating constructive conversation on relevant topics. One interviewee stated, "It does take a person with special skills to be able to accomplish the goals and objectives, and [the team leader] facilitated the process very well." Another interviewee noted, "We were lucky that we had people who know the process; that once we said we wanted to do this ..., they know that system so well that they allowed us to be pretty efficient."

### **Collaboration**

A barrier often cited by interviewees is the lack of collaboration across all of the TQE groups. Some team members mentioned that they are unaware of the work that other teams are doing. Several team members noted that they are so focused on doing the work of their own team that they spend little to no time thinking of opportunities to leverage their work with other teams.

## Communication

The lack of consistent communication between universities and school districts seems to have impacted the work of several teams. Specifically, teams have found few, if any, consistent contacts who represent that communication conduit. Furthermore, many interviewees emphasized the importance of communication, particularly with direct stakeholders, for the success of their team's work. Stakeholders not only need to be notified of each team's work but also need to be brought on board to help disseminate information, garner feedback, and generally help to establish buy-in for the team's efforts. Teams found that communication needs to be timely, precise, and personalized.

## Bureaucratic Processes

The variation in bureaucratic processes across the different entities—schools, universities, and the Iowa Department of Education—was mentioned as a challenge for many of the interviewees. Interviewees discuss some of the difficulties in dealing with the bureaucratic processes in these agencies as follows:

- Bureaucracy in university systems:
  - "...how hard it is to get something done at a university."
  - "It's been a surprise to me how hard it is for schools to get into that world, when in fact, we know exactly what they're going to need once they hit us."
  - "The wheels of a university move very slow. You have to propose it. You have to go to a faculty counsel. You have to then be approved. Then the program has to be okayed.... I've been amazed how long it's taken."
- Bureaucracy in Iowa Department of Education system:
  - "Schools need more flexibility from DE [Iowa Department of Education] in amending the budget."
  - "It just takes a long time to work through all of the basically red tape that it takes to get to spend money.... It's just that it takes a really long time to get permission to do things—to get permission even to spend the money that you've been awarded in a particular way."

## Time

By far, the most commonly cited barrier to doing TQE work is team members' time. Interviewees noted that it is often difficult for teams to find enough common time to get all team members involved in the work and for team members to properly balance their personal time commitments with the needs and demands of the work of the team. This situation also is true of stakeholder time as interviewees shared difficulties with convening stakeholders outside of their daily jobs in order to discuss grant work. Others mentioned that time may impact the team's ability to complete team objectives during the grant timeline. Interviewees discussed how the lack of time has impacted their work on the grant as follows:

- “I think the challenges exist with scheduling and time—to be able to coordinate to get people together, and just the time that it takes with the communication.”
- “There’s no way we’re going to get the end goal all met by the time the grant ends. We’re hoping that it has long-term effects.”
- “[It is] hard to get everyone together at the same time and for a long enough period of time to accomplish work.”

## **Building Consensus**

Many interviewees discussed the challenges their teams face in building consensus both within their teams and occasionally among direct stakeholders. Several interviewees noted that collaborating and developing consensus within their own team was particularly challenging during the first year of work as teams conceptualized their scopes of work, definitions, and a common language. Interviewees noted the importance of cultivating a common vision despite multiple perspectives. For example, one interviewee stated, “It was like we had to model collaboration. We had to learn it as we went, and realize our varying roles, and our gifts and our strengths, as well as the things that need balance.”

## Conclusion and Recommendations

During the past year and a half, six individual teams have put forth tremendous effort and made real strides in moving forward the work of the Iowa Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant. From the perspective of those most closely involved with the work, the full report details those efforts as well as the many barriers and facilitators the teams encountered along the way. Furthermore, team members and stakeholders shared with the evaluation team their views on the various teams' greatest accomplishments of the year as well as goals for continued work.

Several recommendations stand out for the continued success of all teams as they work to improve teacher education in Iowa as follows:

- It is important for each team to make a concerted effort toward promoting and facilitating collaborative conversations with other TQE teams when appropriate. Despite the fact that there are more than 30 teacher preparation institutions in Iowa, several individuals and groups are participating in work for more than one team and available stakeholders will soon become limited. Teams might thoughtfully consider and implement strategies for leveraging one another's work and communicating on behalf of the Iowa Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant as a whole.
- Teams should consider developing more explicit short-term and long-term goals and performance measures for their work. Relative success of the initiatives will be much easier to aim for and describe once these goals have been established.
- Sustainability of this work after the grant ends is paramount to the ongoing improvement of teacher education programs in Iowa. The time is nigh for teams to craft sustainable development plans to allow their efforts to continue to grow long after the grant funds end. This action planning might include communication plans, responsible person(s) or groups, timelines (including short-term and long-term goals), and necessary resources.
- In order to facilitate team meetings as well as convenings for stakeholders, teams should continue thinking about ways to engage and leverage technology in their work. The TQE grant has a technology coordinator who can assist with this planning. Furthermore, details about the TQE grant can be found on the Iowa Department of Education's *Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant Programs* website ([http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com\\_staticxt&staticfile=default.htm](http://www.iowa.gov/educate/index.php?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=default.htm)).

## **Next Steps**

Based on the extensive work of the TQE teams this year as well as much of their proposed work for next year, the Learning Point Associates evaluation team will pursue a variety of next steps for the November 2007 interim report as well as for next year's final report. These steps include further document reviews (e.g., the Reading and Writing in the Content Areas Team proposals for summer institutes and the proposed Middle-Level Content Team endorsements), interviews (e.g., attendees of the tentative Middle-Level Teacher's Academy), and surveys (e.g., of new teachers and faculty at institutions of higher education regarding the competencies developed by the Collaborative Plus Team).

The role and purpose of the evaluation is to provide formative and summative feedback to TQE grant participants, and the evaluation team at Learning Point Associates is constantly looking for ways to make evaluation reports more user friendly. In the coming months of the grant, the evaluation team will be looking to TQE grant participants to provide suggestions as to whether more or different information would be useful to teams as they work to meet their goals. Furthermore, at the upcoming meeting in June 2007 where all TQE teams will be present, the evaluation team will have the opportunity to interact with and observe TQE team members.